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THE NIGHT OF THE SENSES: LITERARY (DIS)ORDERS IN *NOCTURNO DE CHILE*

> En una noche oscura,
> con ansias en amores inflamada,
> (¡oh dichosa ventura!)
> salí sin ser notada,
> estando ya mi casa sosegada.
> San Juan de la Cruz, 'La noche oscura'

Over the course of the last decade, and particularly in the wake of his untimely death at the age of fifty, the Chilean novelist Roberto Bolaño (1953–2003) has come to be viewed by critics and reviewers as perhaps the greatest Latin American writer of his generation and as a literary phenomenon rivaling the international impact of the Boom writers of the 1960s (García Márquez, Fuentes, Vargas Llosa, Cortázar).[1] No doubt Bolaño's reputation as a *poète maudit* – which has been cultivated through his own accounts of vagabondism and drug and alcohol abuse, together with his well-publicized and broadly aimed attacks on Latin American writers and literary institutions – has helped to bolster his critical reception outside the Spanish-speaking world, creating a somewhat ironic situation in which a figure renowned for his iconoclastic attitudes and positions emerges as an international representative of what we continue to call 'Latin American literature'. Although the question of Bolaño's reception is interesting in its own right, I only allude to it as a rhetorical point of departure for what will be my real concern here: the relation between literary language, aesthetics and politics. I begin by rehearsing some arguments advanced by the French thinker Jacques Rancière concerning the politics of literary aesthetics, after which I will turn to a discussion of Bolaño's 2000 novel *Nocturno de Chile*, a literary treatment of the 1973–89 military dictatorship.

Jacques Rancière's recent books, which include such titles as *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* and *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing*, introduce new ways of looking at the intersection between politics and aesthetics following the commencement of democratic political struggles in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This intersection defines an epoch that extends from the late eighteenth century through the present, and which Rancière characterizes as the age of literature.

Let us begin by recalling a key distinction Rancière makes between 'politics' and 'police'. Whereas 'police' refers to the forces and rationales that bestow order on and administer social spaces such as a city-state or nation, politics happens when new voices

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emerge to disrupt the self-presentation of a self-defined whole, shaking up the rationales that a given community employs in order to distribute goods, rights and responsibilities among various members. Politics coincides with the appearance of what Rancière calls 'the part that has no part'. Such a (non)part gives rise to a politics insofar as its demands establish a conjunction of the singular with the universal. When a group not previously accorded full membership in the whole begins to claim rights that have previously been acknowledged as belonging to everyone, this group both reasserts the existence of the common while also calling attention to singularity within the whole – for it has suddenly become clear that the whole is not identical to itself, that it is divided and marked by dissymmetry.

Take, for example, the *demos* or common people as defined by Aristotle. The social taxonomy of Aristotle's *Politics* lists the *oligoï* as possessing wealth, the *aristoï* as embodying virtue and the *demos* as enjoying freedom. Unlike wealth and virtue, however, freedom is an empty quality that cannot truly be possessed by the demos – both because freedom is in fact common to all and, in the particular case of the demos, because it is merely the negative freedom that obtained once it was no longer permissible to enslave debtors in Athens. However, it is when the demos 'misunderstands' this empty freedom as meaning something *more* – something like real equality – that we have politics understood as the *appearance* of the 'part of those who have no part'.[2] I want to stress the importance of the term 'appearance', which indicates where politics and aesthetics touch for Rancière. At the same time, its function in Rancière's argument marks a departure from what 'appearance' has meant for the philosophical tradition from Plato through Hegel. I will return to this point shortly.

The demos's self-interpretation both is and is not a misunderstanding, and it thereby points to an aporia at the heart of the political. On one hand the equation of freedom with equality is groundless, since one can perfectly well attribute freedom to this group without also granting them real equality. On the other hand, this self-interpretation *cannot not* be grounded, in the sense that the demos' capacity to 'misunderstand' – rather than slavishly following orders – is proof that they do indeed have logos. 'Misunderstanding' names the origin of the political as a moment when the self-presentation of the whole is interrupted through the appearance of its uncanny double, the other within the one. It is far from certain that this unhomely excess could easily be reinscribed within a dialectical narrative: indeed, for Rancière it would seem that the emergence of the part that has no part *must not* become an object for dialectics, for then its difference would cease to mean a disjunction within the whole and would instead mean its having been incorporated into a greater administrative rationale or police logic. Misunderstanding thus points up the absence of *arkhê* or first principle that could provide a stable measure of the common and a secure ground for community, and it thus cannot be grasped – or converted into a concept – by the traditional resources of political philosophy. Indeed, it throws the entire architectonic enterprise of political philosophy into question. The divisions and distributions that constitute any given social order – the allotment of goods, rights and responsibilities to each member; the distinction between what is private and what is public; the attunement of a particular sensibility that informs what can be thought, heard and said – must locate and address every particular member of the whole. And yet the appearance of the 'part of those who have no part' exposes the fact that no accounting procedure can preclude

the possibility of being unsettled by a remainder. Every count is already a miscount: not because it falls more or less short of the true count but because calculus must employ language, and language in turn silently introduces the possibility of being heard or used otherwise. In Rancière's words, 'the wrong [that is articulated by the *demos*] is not just the class struggle, [not just] internal dissention to be overcome by giving the city its principle of unity, by founding the city on the *arkhê* – starting point or basis – of community. It is the very impossibility of *arkhê*' (*Disagreement* 13).

I now return to the motif of appearance in the phrase 'the appearance of the part of those who have no part'. Rancière's frequent use of the term *appearance* [*apparence*] announces both an engagement with and a departure from the philosophical tradition and its treatment of appearances from Plato to Hegel. For Plato, outward appearances are mere simulacra that must be deemed false in comparison to the true world of eternal, self-identical forms. Hegel inverts this Platonic schema by identifying mere appearance [*Schein*] as the foundation of aesthetics and as co-originary with any thought of the essence of things: the very act of postulating a true world beyond or behind the realm of mere appearances already presupposes – and thus finds itself dependent on – the shadowy world of simulacra. As Hegel puts it in the *Lectures on Fine Art*, 'the beautiful [*Schöne*] has its being in pure appearance [*Schein*]....[And] appearance itself is essential to essence'. For Rancière, however, appearance has nothing to do with the old onto-theological distinction between the sensuous and the spiritual, or the sensible and the intelligible, or between what is outwardly manifest and what lies concealed behind the phenomenon, nor is it the dialectical reconciliation of these differences. 'Appearance' refers to two distinct tendencies that exist in a relation of aporetic incompatibility within Rancière's understanding of social organization. For one, appearance names the culmination of the distribution of the sensible, a sharing-out of the common that shapes what can be thought, heard, said – or what is able to 'appear' – within a given regime. At the same time, appearance can also indicate the presence of a part that has not yet been counted and accounted for by the prevailing distribution; appearance in this sense names the emergence of an uncanny double that disrupts the sensible self-presentation of the whole.

Perhaps the closest analogy to what Rancière calls the politics of aesthetics is found in the transcendental aesthetic in Kant's first *Critique*, which asserts that the possibilities for sense experience are determined by the subjective a priori categories of space and time rather than by qualities proper to the things themselves.[3] For Rancière the sensible world around us is similarly constituted by an a priori sensibility that informs how we experience and relate to one another while also determining what counts as truth and knowledge. The aesthetic thus distributes space, calibrates time and gives form to social activity. As sensibility, the aesthetic not only shapes perception, it also causes sense data to appear as so many 'self-evident facts'. It thereby renders imperceptible the archi-political shaping of the sensible. Whereas the Kantian transcendental aesthetic does not vary through history, the a priori schema for divvying up the social in Rancière is subject to transformation. Rancière sketches three 'regimes' that entail distinct modes of organizing sense perception, language and social relations.

The first of these three orders is the Platonic 'ethical regime of images', in which social organization is grounded in the distinction between good and bad uses of mimesis and the determination of what place is proper to whom in the community. The Platonic polis requires a decision as to who will be allowed to imitate and who is not,

and thus, by extension, about who is qualified to legislate and who is not. At the same time, the ethical regime in Plato presupposes a specific economy of time: no one – or almost no one – is able to do more than one thing at a time and do them well; the carpenter makes tables while the farmer farms, and neither may dabble in the work or knowledge of others when not engaged in his own practice. The lone exceptions in this economy of time and *tekhne* are found in the poet – who improperly presumes to speak beyond his sphere of expertise, and who must therefore be excluded from any well-ordered polis – and the philosopher, who is the only one legitimately able to do more than one thing: the philosopher both thinks and legislates.

Following on the heels of the Platonic regime of images Rancière locates the Aristotelian 'representative regime of arts'. Aristotle frees mimesis from the ethical constraints imposed on it by Plato while establishing new normative codifications and hierarchies that tie particular literary genres to social classes: tragedy and epic serve to represent the highest social groups while comedy provides the medium for representing the experiences of the common or the demos. Aristotle thus brings poetry back into the community, even going so far as to accord it a higher status than merely descriptive uses of language. Whereas Greek historical writing merely records what has already taken place, poetry speaks of what *might* happen. Aristotelian poetics thus aligns itself with philosophy in according ontological privilege to possibility over actuality. At the same time, it also participates in policing this distinction by ensuring a logical correspondence between generic codes and social distinctions. Poetic theory helps ensure that this correspondence will, over the course of the following two millennia, appear as self-evident and natural instead of contingent and subject to challenge.

The third order is what Rancière terms the 'aesthetic regime of arts'. The birth of the aesthetic regime roughly coincides with Kant's Copernican revolution and with the democratic, bourgeois social revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It makes its mark by abolishing the Aristotelian hierarchy of literary genres, proclaiming instead the radical equality of subjects and subject matter. As was the case with Aristotle, literature exemplifies this democratic transformation in 'the order of things'. There are two main ways in which this happens.

On one hand, modern literature brings to light and exploits a new awareness that what Socrates referred to in Plato's *Phaedrus* as the orphaned nature of the written word is in fact a constitutive feature of all language, spoken or written. What twentieth-century linguistics will describe as the signifier's radical separation from the signified (or the view that meaning derives from transactions between signifiers that bypass the signified altogether) allows us to see a crack in the foundation of the logos itself. By making evident and availing itself of the 'orphaned' status of the signifier, modern literature from Romanticism forward announces what Rancière calls the 'democratic disorder of literariness': language now comes to be seen as a common [matter] that can be taken up by anyone regardless of their qualifications, and the old connections between speech, intention and authority thus fade into the background. In an analogous fashion, modern politics is born with the beheading of the old sovereign whose authority was derived from blood lineage and from God, and with the proclamation of a new sovereign that goes by the name of 'the people'. The democratic sensibility that emerges with this event announces a new awareness that the language of law and politics is inherently open to being redeployed and reconfigured in new ways that are not necessarily compatible with the original intentions of its authors. This can be seen,

for example, in the appropriation of the political vocabulary of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat in nineteenth-century France, and likewise by anti-colonial struggles such as the Haitian revolution which 'improperly' take up the ideals of liberty and equality that had recently been declared universal *for Frenchmen*.

On the other hand, beginning with realism, modern literature increasingly distances itself from views of language as instrument or reflection of individual subjects and their wills; it focuses instead on language and social practices as comprising a vast, impersonal tapestry that, in Rancière's words, 'display[s] the character of a time or a society' ('Politics of Literature' 18). Beginning with Balzac, modern literature tends to approach and frame its subject matter, no matter how insignificant or portentous, as an array of clues about social organization or as 'symptoms' waiting to be interpreted. These two tendencies – literary disorder and orphandom on one hand, interpretation and symptomatology on the other hand – coexist in an uneasy relation with one another within the aesthetic regime.

I want to bring this discussion of Rancière to a close by proposing that his thinking about politics and aesthetics performs what we could call the poetics of sovereignty while also illuminating the failure of the logic of sovereignty. This, in my view, is the fundamental aporia of his thinking. Let us recall, first, that politics begins with the appearance of the 'part that has no part', and that this part speaks in a voice that has not previously been acknowledged as proper to the community. At the same time, if its singular claim is to acquire a political valence it must make itself valid not for this particular part alone but for the whole; in other words, it must universalize itself. This is what I am calling the poetics of sovereignty: a singular speaking that bears with it the force of the universal. For Rancière, as we have seen, the universal is not simply the aggregate of parts that make up the whole: it is instead the common which displaces the self-identity of the whole, opening it up to that which its self-presentation would repress. Rancière's notion of 'misunderstanding' exposes the miscount at the heart of the social, while also underscoring that this flaw is structural and not secondary. The logic of sovereignty institutes a calculus of the social that is unable to account for every part of the whole it brings into view. The very act of codifying and legislating introduces the possibility of the incalculable, a potential opening for the emergence of a previously uncounted part.

I now turn to Roberto Bolaño's *Nocturno de Chile* (2000). My aim is to explore how the mutual implication of aesthetics and politics can give shape to a strong reading of the novel. At the same time, I am somewhat wary about the kind of critical acclaim this novel has generated, a reception which in my view attests to something less than a truly *critical* assessment of the novel – of what is truly interesting in Bolaño's writing as well as of the ambiguities found in this particular work. *Nocturno de Chile* is the death-bed memoire and pseudo-confession of Sebastián Urrutia Lacroix, a priest who belongs to the far-right Catholic organization Opus Dei and whose primary fame comes from his work as a literary critic, which he published under the pseudonym H. Ibacache.[4] While the narrative development draws exclusively from Urrutia's recollections of personal experiences and anecdotes, these memories provide a meticulous account of his dealings with key actors and his participation – albeit frequently from the sidelines – in key moments in recent Chilean history. This personal memoire thus composes a tapestry in which the history of present-day Chile can be deciphered and analyzed. The narrative invites us to interpret not only the key decisions and deeds but also the

silences, repressions and forgetting that have shaped Chilean social history from Allende's Unidad Popular government to dictatorship and, finally, neoliberal democracy.

The novel's epigraph, a single sentence – *Quítese la peluca* – taken from Chesterton's short story 'The Purple Wig', provides one interpretive key for reading the novel. 'The Purple Wig' is a tale of theft and deception, illegitimacy and legitimization, which recounts the illicit appropriation of an estate and a noble title by a bourgeois lawyer. It ends with an ironic reflection on the purpose of noble titles in perpetuating the British state. The words selected by Bolaño for his epigraph are uttered by Chesterton's narrator, an investigative reporter who has become suspicious of the imposter's identity and threatens to expose him as a fake. By the time we reach the end of the story, however, we can see that this command had already been inscribed, at the moment it was uttered, in a larger pattern of dissimulation and reinscription.

The eponymous wig in Chesterton's story has a long history indeed. The real Duke, prior to being usurped by the lawyer, wore a wig whose purpose – at least according to popular rumor – was to conceal a congenital deformity that had cursed the family for generations, a defect so hideous that it would cause anyone who set eyes on it to lose their wits. The imposter, who is employed by the Duke as his financial attorney, deceives his client by mismanaging his estate and leading him into bankruptcy, after which he steps in and buys the impoverished Duke's estate. The lawyer assumes the identity of the Duke, donning a similar wig which no longer serves to conceal a trait presumed to be socially unpresentable but instead hides the fact that the imposter has nothing to hide – nothing, that is, except his own improper social origin. This is the first deception: the wig is a mask that hides the fact that there is nothing to hide. It thus allegorizes the difference between two hegemonic classes: the aristocracy, whose supremacy is established by the natural order of blood lineage, and the bourgeoisie, whose superiority is assured by culture. Insofar as anyone and everyone can acquire culture through education, bourgeois hegemony is constitutively unable to establish a secure and stable distinction between those who govern and the governed. At the same time, could we not say that the wig hides, and has indeed always served to hide, *the nothing*? For the nobility this 'nothing' was an uncanny trait that accompanied the determination of social authority and right through divine will and blood lineage: it was the naturalization of authority gone awry, a genetic defect that associated with the tradition of intermarriage. With the bourgeois lawyer, meanwhile, this 'nothing' is the absence of any essentializable criteria for determining social class and order. When Chesterton's narrator finally finishes his investigative work of unpacking the secret history of this misappropriation, he also learns that the truth he has worked to uncover is never to be revealed to the public. It turns out that the English crown was well aware that the lawyer was not a duke when it authenticated the title he had appropriated from the Duke. Indeed, the entire social structure of titles and estates proves to be nothing more than a fiction, an official means of sanctioning and legitimating a form of accumulation that would otherwise be visible as domination, bloodshed and terror. We have thus been forewarned at the threshold of Bolaño's novel that the trope of unveiling or revelation – exemplified by the investigative reporter's desire to distinguish between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' aristocrats – is part and parcel of

the game of concealment, dissimulation and reinscription that accompany the history of what Marx called primitive accumulation.

Urrutia's feverish account begins enigmatically by alluding to – while in the same breath also denying – the existence of unsettled accounts from his past. This ambiguity is then given a name: it is the one whom Urrutia refers to as 'el joven envejecido' (which turns out to be a euphemism for his own conscience or superego) who has been spreading rumors and insinuations about the priest's misdeeds. Urrutia promises what will have been his final words to the task of resolving these loose ends and justifying not only his acts but also his words and silences:

> Hay que aclarar algunos puntos. Así que me apoyaré en un codo y levantaré la cabeza, mi noble cabeza temblorosa, y rebuscaré en el rincón de los recuerdos aquellos actos que me justifican . . . Hay que ser responsable. Eso lo he dicho toda mi vida. Uno tiene la obligación moral de ser responsable de sus actos y también de sus palabras e incluso de sus silencios, sí, de sus silencios porque también los silencios ascienden al cielo y los oye Dios y sólo Dios los comprende y los juzga, así que mucho cuidado con los silencios. Yo soy responsable de todo. Mis silencios son inmaculados. (11–12)

I will return to the question of responsibility in due time. First, however, a brief synopsis of the plot will help to situate my comments. Urrutia follows this initial hesitation by taking us from his early ordainment as a Catholic priest to his other 'baptism' in the rarefied literary circles that gather at the family estate of Farewell, Chile's leading critic. Farewell bears an unmistakable likeness to the real-life Hernán Díaz Arrieta (1891–1984), whose literary column – published under the pseudonym 'Alone' – appeared in the Santiago daily *El Mercurio* for more than four decades. Farewell begins to play the role of a second father to the young Urrutia, introducing him to Neruda and the other leading lights of the Chilean literary scene. Following a lengthy account of a weekend spent on Farewell's estate, which includes a number of significant moments – including a sexual encounter between Urrutia and Farewell, his first meeting with Neruda, as well as a pair of run-ins with group of campesinos living on Farewell's *fundo* (more on these *peones* shortly) – the narrative then jumps ahead several decades to relate how, in the turmoil surrounding Allende's socialist revolution in the early 1970s, Urrutia retreated from public life and buried himself in the seemingly remote and endless task of re-reading the Ancient Greeks. Despite what his account would have us believe, it is clear that we are to read this retreat into the classical archive in reverse, or symptomatically as Rancière would say, both with and against Urrutia's self-interpretation: real insight into the way things are today can only come through interrogation of the history of the present, which is to say both the ways in which the past silently persists or returns in the present, as well as the sense in which the present always already rests on a certain interpretation of the past.

Urrutia returns from his seclusion following the 1973 military coup. At a time when many in his social circles were being targeted by the repressive apparatus of the military state, Urrutia enjoys immunity thanks to his Opus Dei membership, and he is even invited to teach a seminar on Marxism for Pinochet and his staff. The narrative – and with it, Urrutia's life – finally comes to a close in the historical limbo of

post-dictatorship Chile, a time when all social antagonisms and ideological conflict have been banished from the national stage.

We can begin to unravel the problem of responsibility by looking more closely at the final sentence of Urrutia's memoir, uttered as he confronts the imminence of death. These last words have the ironic effect of displacing the thought of salvation – toward which, as we have seen, the narrative had been directed since the beginning – with the unredeemable image of a solitude that breaches the integrity of the body and suspends the grammatical unity of the narrative subject: 'Y después se desata la tormenta de mierda' (150). This 'después' abruptly suspends the theological temporality of redemption that had been set in motion with the original promise to settle all accounts. Let us recall, furthermore, that the distinction the English language makes between eschatology and scatology, or between the theological science of death and final judgment and the mundane science of bad literature or shit, does not exist in Spanish, where a single word – *escatalogía* – performs double duty. While this term does not itself appear in Bolaño's text, it plays the role of a silent axis linking the threshold of the novel to the conclusion while ensuring that beginning and end will never fully coincide.

The approximately 140 pages that intervene between the opening promise and the conclusion are anything but an ethical act of assuming responsibility – responsibility for one's sins and responsibility to the other. What comes into focus, instead, are the ways in which Urrutia's presence – in the social and intellectual circles of the Chilean elite, in teaching a seminar on Marxism to the military junta, and so on – makes him complicit in what transpires, regardless of what he may have said or done. Perhaps the clearest instance of this thematization of complicity is found in Urrutia's account of the weekend he spent at Farewell's *fundo* shortly after his consecration as a priest. While the invitation is a stamp of admission into a rarified level within the Chilean elite, during his stay there Urrutia is also twice party to encounters with a group of *peones* who manifestly have no part in any such community of letters. He first comes across them when, having lost his way while out for a walk, he catches sight of a humble peasant abode. However, this meeting between a Catholic priest and what might easily have been his rustic 'flock' proves to be the antithesis of what we would expect: when he lets himself into the hut Urrutia is told that one of the children is either dying or has already died. His response to this appeal for help reflects his disinterest as well as his abdication of his sacerdotal mandate: '¿Y a mí para qué me necesitaban? ¿El niño se estaba muriendo? Pues que llamaran un médico. ¿El niño hacía tiempo que ya se había muerto? Pues que le rezaran, entonces, una novena a la Virgen' (21).

On a second walking expedition Urrutia runs across another group of *peones* (or perhaps it is the same group: his inability to distinguish one from another is symptomatic of his un-sacerdotal lack of care for the other). He describes this encounter first by turning to clichés about rustic simplicity and reserve, and concludes by stating that these *campesinos* appear to come from someplace else and seem to be residing in an entirely different historical temporality:

> Ellas me vieron y yo las vi. ¿Y qué fue lo que vi? Ojeras. Labios partidos. Pómulos brillantes. Una paciencia que no me pareció resignación cristiana. Una paciencia como venida de otras latitudes. Una paciencia que no era chilena aunque aquellas mujeres fueran chilenas. Una paciencia que no se había gestado en nuestro país ni

> en América y que ni siquiera era una paciencia europea, ni asiática, ni africana (aunque estas dos últimas culturas me son prácticamente desconocidas). Una paciencia como venida del espacio exterior. (32)

There is much to comment on in this recollection, in particular concerning Urrutia's mnemonic focus on the exchange of glances and the face of the other as the primary site at which her alterity shows itself to him. I will limit myself, however, to remarking briefly on the motif of *paciencia*, which appears here as subaltern affect, as the abiding attunement of those who dwell within the boundaries of national sovereignty but who are not visible as part of the whole, not yet seen as fully Chilean. Urrutia's explanation of their difference in terms of geography or extraterrestriality attempts to provide a cognitive map in which the uncanny presence of those who are of Chile but not fully Chilean could be located.

As an affective accompaniment to the geographic or terrestrial difference that these *peones* appear to embody, *paciencia* denotes a capacity to endure pain, affliction and inconvenience without complaining, to suffer provocation without responding in kind; it names a self-contained, unchanging permanence amidst the flux of history. *Paciencia* is thus Urrutia's attempt to personify and personalize the Chilean – but not exclusively Chilean – experience of 'uneven development' in a spiritualist, quasi-theological vocabulary – though he is quick to add that it is *not* a Christian resignation that they display, which conveniently places them outside the priest's domain of responsibility.[5] *Paciencia* is a marker of absolute difference vis-à-vis both the Catholic teleology of suffering and salvation and a modernity whose proper temporality is precisely that of development, of frenetic transformation, speed and impatience. The innate disposition of these *campesinos* would seem to place them outside history itself, with the allusion to their extraterrestrial origins acting as metaphor for world history defined since Hegel as the teleological trajectory of spiritual development or self-consciousness. Patience, in other words, is precisely that which does not allow itself to be touched by the progressive spirit of world history, and which is therefore resistant to what the rest of the world acknowledges as the self-evident truths of modernization. Patience is able to bear affliction and abuse because it resides outside historical time itself. Can it thus be eliminated with impunity and without ritual?

The motif of 'extraterrestriality' recurs several times in *Nocturno de Chile*, and can be productively linked to what Ignacio Echevarría, paraphrasing George Steiner, describes as Bolaño's 'extraterritoriality' (*Desvíos* 48–53). This term is meant to describe Bolaño's uneasy relation to any locus of belonging, be it place (Chile, Mexico, Latin America; Spain, Catalunya, Blanes) or language. For Echevarría, extraterritoriality is characterized by a late modern experience of decentering in relation to older, relatively stable configurations of literary production within the time and space of the nation-state and its history. This scene with the *peones*, however, would seem to call into question the assumption that 'extraterritoriality' is specific to late capitalism, globalization, the crisis of state sovereignty, or what have you. Here, on the contrary, we see extraterritoriality as co-originary with the affirmation of national belonging, and as a corollary of what might be termed the infranational status of the subaltern.

Another instance of disavowed responsibility emerges in a recollection that mirrors the real-life case of Mariana Callejas. Callejas organized a weekly literary salon in her upscale Santiago home during the mid-1970s, providing a rare gathering place

for writers and intellectuals during the early years of the Pinochet dictatorship. Meanwhile, her husband – the American Michael Townley – worked for the Chilean intelligence services torturing political prisoners in the house's basement. Urrutia recounts having attended the salon on occasion, noting retrospectively that certain representatives of the Chilean literary vanguard were in fact in a disconcerting proximity to the apparatus of illegal repression and state terror. The truly unthinkable moment in this sordid affair occurs one evening when one of the literary guests inadvertently finds his way into the basement and stumbles across a torture victim lying shackled to a bed. The guest returns upstairs, shaken, and discloses his discovery to the other guests. The party breaks up with scarcely a word; but then the following week things proceed again as usual, as if nothing had ever happened. Urrutia first expresses his incredulity over how the guests could return as they did, and then offers the observation that 'la rutina matiza todo horror' (142). He concludes by echoing the words of María Canales, the Mariana Callejas stand-in: 'así se hace la literatura'.

The motif of complicity appears here with the prospect that while many of the invited guests may not have had any idea about what was going on beneath their feet – or had no clue where they really were – yet their decisions to continue attending metonymically illustrate the way in which an entire society both saw and preferred not to see. This anecdote takes critical aim at literary institutions in Chile and the rest of Latin America. It performs a symptomatic reversal of the concept of the vanguard, of that part that is, in Marx and Engels' words, 'most advanced and resolute' and which 'pushes forward all others' while 'clearly understanding the lines of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results' of revolutionary action (*Communist Manifesto* 484). In addition to the jab at the Chilean vanguard, it implicates the institutional forces and practices that make up what we call 'literature' today in Latin America, targeting the institution tendencies that favor a mode of literary production which, in Bolaño's view, has contributed more to the deadening of our sensibilities than to anything else, for example through the formulaic application and marketing of a 'magical realist' style whose proliferation can only exoticize and banalize the experience of the real.[6]

Bolaño's critique of literary institutions is well known and I will not delve into it further here. Instead, I want to point out that there is something odd about this moment in the novel, which among other things advances a cautionary note about literary aesthetics as such, warning that the routinization involved in the canonization of literary formulas has the effect of anesthetizing us to the singularity and the horror of the real. However, in the figure of a torture victim lying handcuffed to a bed, it would seem that Bolaño himself could not have chosen a more traveled, well-worn cliché to exemplify the contemporary experience of terror. It is thus extremely difficult to decide how the juxtaposition of Bolaño's critical assessment of Latin American literary institutions with his own aesthetics of the sublime should be read. Does Bolaño's novel provide an imagistic performance – the torture victim as internal failure of the literary aesthetic – of the same message it conveys in words? Does Bolaño somehow repeat the very crime of which he accuses others of the 'post-Boom' generations, as if to demonstrate despite himself that literature *cannot avoid* routinizing whatever it touches, even when it protests against this deadening of our moral and aesthetic sensibilities? What if literature's task were to point us toward the real as that which ordinary language is unable to signify or that which signification can only destroy, but in doing

this literature itself proves still to be gesturing? Literature begins when language as meaning or signification enters into doubt, but literature cannot keep itself pure and free of the problem of signification.

The third and final scene I want to comment on under the heading of responsibility concerns Urrutia's decision in 1973 to accept a secret invitation to teach classes on Marxism to the military junta in order to help them to get to know the enemy.[7] In reflecting on this moment from the distance of his deathbed Urrutia recalls having faced an ethical dilemma: did he do the right thing in agreeing to teach the class? Was his decision to provide pedagogical assistance to the junta consistent with the ethics of his sacerdotal position? Was it a betrayal of his literary friends and colleagues, many of whom would be identified as enemies of the military regime and thus legitimate targets of state terror? As he recalls having been plagued by doubts and worried about the prospect of his secret becoming public knowledge – and thus his literary and priestly reputations sullied beyond repair – he finally discloses that his actions did indeed become common knowledge, thanks to the indiscretion of his friend Farewell. Much to his surprise, however, nobody bats an eye. The explanation for this is interesting insofar as it opens up a poetic and rhetorical passageway between dictatorship and postdictatorship, a crossing Urrutia envisions as a kind of wasteland – or perhaps a purgatory.

> Después, con estupor, me di cuenta de que a nadie le importaba un pepino. Las figuras hieráticas que poblaban la patria se dirigían, inconmovibles, hacia un horizonte gris y desconocido en el que apenas se vislumbran unos rayos lejanos, unos relámpagos, unas humaredas. ¿Qué había allí? No lo sabíamos. Ningún Sordello. Eso sí. Ningún Guido. Árboles verdes no. Trotes de caballo no. Ninguna discusión, ninguna investigación. Nos dirigíamos acaso hacia nuestras almas o hacia las almas en pena de nuestros antepasados, la planicie interminable que los merecimientos propios y ajenos habían extendido ante nuestros ojos legañosos o llorosos, exangües o afrentados. Así que resultaba hasta natural que a nadie le importaran mis clases de introducción al marxismo. Todos, tarde o temprano, iban a volver a compartir el poder. Derecha, centro, izquierda, todos de la misma familia. Problemas éticos, algunos. Problemas estéticos, ninguno. Hoy gobierna un socialista y vivimos exactamente igual. Los comunistas (que viven como si el Muro no hubiera caído), los democratacristianos, los socialistas, la derecha y los militares. O al revés. ¡Lo puedo decir al revés! ¡El orden de los factores no altera el producto! (120–1)

There can be no movement here because there is no longer any resistance – just as the dove of Kant's First *Critique* would discover to its dismay that it cannot fly through empty space. The transition (dictatorship to democracy or state to market) is thus a contradiction insofar as the terrain it inaugurates (in 1973 or in 1989, in this respect there is very little difference) is synonymous with the suspension of the *trans-* or the possibility of thinking someplace else. Here and now is all there is, and thus *here* and *now* cease to signify the experience of place and history, both of which presuppose the possibility of thinking the present otherwise. This purgatorial vision of the present is intensified because the political has been redefined – and depoliticized – as the space of consensus: left, center or right, it's all indifferent, they're all of the same family. It is

an irony of the novel – if not of history – that Urrutia's recollections of Farewell's *peones* as creatures living outside world history turns out, at least formally speaking, to be the same destiny that awaits post-dictatorship Chile.

The scenes I have been discussing so far in *Nocturno de Chile* can be drawn together under the general headings of literary symptomatologies of exclusion, repression and silence. By way of conclusion, I now want to turn briefly to a scene that illustrates the crisis of transcendence or the improper origin of the logos. Literary reflection on the logos in Bolaño's novel, I propose, introduces the thought of something analogous to what Rancière calls the democratic disorder of literariness as a counterpoint to the 'post-political' purgatory that is the apparent destiny of neoliberal consensus. The motif of the orphaned letter first emerges in Urrutia's recollections of his entrance into the seminary, a decision that his father had significantly opposed. Urrutia's consecration into the priesthood takes place at the same time that he first meets Farewell, who soon after enters into the role of a substitute father whom Urrutia invests with moral and intellectual authority, and whose social prominence – as a respected public intellectual and as a member of the Chilean oligarchy – provides the priest with an anchoring point against the social turmoil of the 1970s. The thematic shuffling of the paternal order and the logos – the displacement of the biological father and the negation of his 'No' by the heavenly father and the incarnate word or logos, and then again by the cultural authority embodied by Farewell – finds a number of echoes in the narrator's own language, as can be seen in this amusing passage:

> A la edad de catorce, entré en el seminario, y cuando salí, al cabo de mucho tiempo, mi madre me besó la mano y me dijo padre o yo creí entender que me llamaba padre y ante mi asombro y mis protestas (no me llame padre, madre, yo soy su hijo, le dije, o tal vez no le dije su hijo sino el hijo) ella se puso a llorar o púsose a llorar y yo entonces pensé, o tal vez sólo lo pienso ahora, que la vida es una sucesión de equívocos que nos conducen a la verdad final, la única verdad. (13)

The conflation of a term of biological and familial relation with a sacerdotal title in the signifier 'padre' is structural and not accidental since, as Nietzsche reminds us in 'On Truth and Lie in an Extra-moral Sense', the origin of truth is rhetorical in nature, belonging to the structure of metaphor and metonymy and not to some natural or divine mandate. It is the very possibility of equivocation and misuse, of condensation and displacement, which makes language what it is in the first place. At the same time, we can see how Urrutia's relation to Farewell – and by extension his relation to the cultural authority of literary institutions – is inescapably bound up with this uncanny glimpse into language's duplicity, represented here by the orphaned signifier 'padre'. All of this is compounded by the fact that in this familial exchange between Urrutia and his mother the evasion and repetition of this signifier amounts to a traumatic repetition of the primal scene. The father – and with him the logos – is only symbolically present in the above passage. Cited, he is thus already dead and incapable of concealing his lack, which discloses itself as the split within the signifier *padre* (biological father or priest). By the same token, the narrator's vacillation between '*su hijo*' or '*el hijo*' brings to mind the Biblical discourse of Christ, who alternately describes himself as '*el hijo de Dios*' and '*el hijo del hombre*'. The strange and unexplained presence of *el hijo* in Urrutia's memory echoes the doctrine of revealed religion that has just been infused into the young priest,

a dogma proclaiming that the divine has assumed human form, that the universal takes place in and as the particular.

This reflection on the orphaned letter together with the crisis of the logos as paternal guarantor of meaning cannot be restricted to the domains of literary and linguistic concerns. The theme of the orphaned letter exposes literature's reflection on its own language to an unavoidable consideration of how social orders are constituted and administered, and how such partitionings justify social relations and forms of accumulation. At the same time, it also exposes the cracks in the foundations of such orders, cracks which can become the openings for politics. Language is itself the common of which Rancière speaks, and as common it is both what brings us together and what divides us – from ourselves as much as from each other.

Notes

1 For an account of Bolaño's critical reception see Ignacio Echevarría, 'Bolaño extraterritorial' in *Desvíos*.
2 The matter of equality is a central feature of the political in Rancière, in part no doubt because the emergence of the 'part that has no part' necessitates debate over the *meaning* of equality (distributive justice, equality of economic opportunity, equal access to education, public ownership of the means of production, etc.), while at the same time reinforcing the fact that the meaning of equality is neither self-evident nor able to be secured in a way that would free it from the possibility of other interpretations and determinations.
3 I am grateful to Brett Levinson (personal correspondence) for his help in synthesizing Rancière's discussions of the role played by aesthetics in Rancière's thought. See also his chapter on Rancière in *Market and Thought* for a very helpful discussion of the status of language in Rancière's thinking about the political.
4 Urrutia's personal and professional profile closely resembles that of José Miguel Ibáñez Langlois, a living Catholic priest, literary critic and academic.
5 On the question of 'uneven development' and the ideological problems it poses for post-Hegelian thought, see John Kraniauskas's splendid 'Difference Against Development: Spiritual Accumulation and the Politics of Freedom'.
6 On Bolaño's disparaging assessment of literary institutions in Latin America see 'Sevilla me mata' and 'Los mitos de Cthulhu'. Following Bolaño's death in 2003 a polemic was initiated between one of Bolaño's Spanish friends and critics, Ignacio Echevarría, and the Mexican novelist Jorge Volpi, concerning posthumous interpretations and allegedly malicious misinterpretations of Bolaño's comments on Latin American literary institutions. The polemic revolves around Echevarría's commentary on Bolaño's 'Sevilla me mata', a presentation delivered just a few days before his death, at a conference organized by Seix Barral that he attended with Volpi and other Latin American writers.
7 The invitation perhaps alludes to a book published by Ibáñez Langlois in 1973 entitled *El marxismo: visión crítica*.

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